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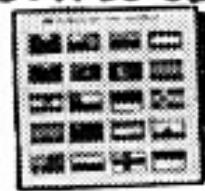
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CHAIN OF COMMAND

ON JUNE 6, 1944, THE INVASION OF OCCUPIED EUROPE WAS LAUNCHED BY ALLIED LAND, SEA AND AIR FORCES. IN THE EARLY HOURS OF THAT HISTORIC DAY, THE SOLDIERS OF THE LIBERATION ARMY STORMED THE BULLET-SWEPT BEACHES. THE LAST BATTLE TO THE DEATH WITH NAZI GERMANY HAD BEGUN...



Chapter 1. The Tide Turns

THE GERMANS FOUGHT BACK WITH FANATICAL FEROCITY BUT THE ALLIES GRIMLY HELD ON TO THEIR BEACHHEAD -- AND BY THE END OF JULY, NEARLY A MILLION TROOPS WERE ASHORE IN NORMANDY. SLOWLY, RELUCTANTLY, THE WEHRMACHT FELL BACK ...



MONTHS OF BITTER FIGHTING FOLLOWED. IN BELGIUM, THE ENEMY GATHERED HIS STRENGTH AND HIT BACK IN A DESPERATE BID TO STEM THE TIDE OF WAR ...



BUT THE BID FAILED. FIELD BY FIELD, VILLAGE BY VILLAGE, TOWN BY TOWN, THE ALLIES BATTLED THEIR WAY INTO HOLLAND.



EXHAUSTED BY THE ORDEAL OF CONTINUOUS BATTLE AND THE STRAIN OF BEING CONSTANTLY IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH, BRITISH AND AMERICAN TROOPS PERSUADED THEMSELVES THAT THE ENEMY WAS ALREADY DEFEATED...

JERRY'S BEATEN!
DONE FOR! LOOK AT THAT
POUNDING HE GOT AT THE
BATTLE OF THE BULGE,
SARGE! I HEARD THEY LOST
THREE WHOLE DIVISIONS --
WIPE OUT TO A MAN!

YOU MAY BE RIGHT,
JACKSON. JERRY'S A TOUGH
FIGHTER BUT THERE'S A LIMIT.
THERE WERE ALL THE TROOPS
THEY LOST AT THE FALAISE
GAP -- AS WELL AS ON THE
RUSSIAN FRONT. THEY
MUST BE READY TO
CHUCK IN THE TOWEL.



BUT THEY WERE WRONG. WITH THEIR BACKS TO THE RHINE AND THE FATHERLAND, THE ENEMY PREPARED TO MAKE A LAST GREAT STAND ALONG THE SIEGFRIED LINE AND IN THE REICHSWALD FOREST.



THERE, IN THAT VAST, THICKLY-WOODED AREA BRITISH AND GERMANS WERE TO ENDURE PERHAPS THE LAST GREAT BATTLE AND SOME OF THE BITTEREST FIGHTING OF THE WAR.

BUT TO LIEUTENANT COLONEL ANGUS FRASER, COMMANDING OFFICER OF THE 3RD GLENSHIRE BORDERERS, THE WAR SEEMED VERY FAR AWAY. WITH A SNORT OF DISGUST, HE THREW ASIDE THE DAY'S NEWSPAPER AND GLARED OUT OF THE MESS WINDOW AT THE WINTRY SCOTTISH COUNTRYSIDE.

THE GERMANS ARE FALLING BACK TOWARDS THE RHINE, NEIL. AT THIS RATE, THE WAR WILL BE OVER IN A COUPLE OF WEEKS OR SO.



HIS SECOND-IN-COMMAND, MAJOR NEIL CURRAN, SAW THE WOUNDED PRIDE IN THE OLD MAN'S EYES.

NEIL, I'VE COMMANDED THE THIRD GLENSHIRE'S FOR OVER TWENTY YEARS AND I SUPPOSE I'VE MADE A FAIR JOB OF IT. BUT NEVER HAVE I LED IT INTO ACTION--AND IT LOOKS NOW AS IF I NEVER WILL. HANG IT, WHAT'S THE USE OF A SOLDIER IF HE'S NEVER BEEN TO WAR!

SIR!



THE SIGNAL SERGEANT'S EYES SHONE WITH EXCITEMENT AS HE HELD OUT THE MESSAGE FORM ...

JUST RECEIVED THIS MESSAGE FROM COMMAND, SIR. WE'RE GOING OVER THERE, SIR. THEY'VE SENT FOR US AT LAST!

WHAT'S THAT? HERE --- LET ME SEE THAT SIGNAL!



THERE WAS A NEW FIRE IN THE OLDER OFFICER'S EYES NOW -- A TREMOR OF EAGERNESS IN HIS VOICE . . .

AT LAST, NEIL, IT'S COME! WE'VE GOT TO MOVE FAST, TOO -- WE SAIL IN THREE DAYS' TIME -- FOR FRANCE!

THAT'S GREAT NEWS, SIR. I'LL ALERT THE ORDERLY ROOM.



BUT, PRIVATELY, NEIL CURRAN WAS NOT AT ALL SURE THAT IT *WAS* GOOD NEWS!

I WONDER, DOES THE OLD MAN *REALLY* KNOW WHAT HE'S GOING INTO? HE'S AS INEXPERIENCED AS THE REST OF US IN THE REGIMENT. THIS WILL BE HIS FIRST REAL TEST OF BATTLE COMMAND. I JUST HOPE AND PRAY HE MEASURES UP TO IT!



HERDED INTO A TROOPSHIP, THE THIRD GLENSHIRE BORDERERS LEFT SCOTLAND TO GO TO WAR

THOSE LADS LOOK CHEERFUL ENOUGH, YOU'D THINK THEY WERE OFF ON A PLEASURE CRUISE!

I KNOW, I WAS TALKING TO THEIR C.O. THE OLD BOY WAS AS EXCITED AS A SCHOOL KID OFF ON HIS HOLS. BUT MAYBE THE WAR'LL BE OVER BY THE TIME THEY GET TO THE FRONT. LET'S HOPE SO, ANYWAY!



A CONVOY OF LORRIES TOOK THE GLENSHIRE'S ACROSS FRANCE AND INTO HOLLAND, ONLY LATELY WRESTED FROM THE NAZI GRIP.

WE SHOULDN'T HAVE MUCH FARTHER TO GO, SID. WE'VE BEEN ON THE MOVE FOR TEN HOURS ALREADY.

PROBABLY WE'LL GO INTO CAMP TONIGHT—I DON'T SUPPOSE THEY'LL BUNG US STRAIGHT INTO ACTION. THEY'RE BOUND TO GIVE US TIME TO GET THE FEEL OF THINGS FIRST.



BUT, AN HOUR LATER, A DISPATCH RIDER DELIVERED URGENT ORDERS TO COLONEL FRASER.

SEEMS LIKE THE WAR IS HOTTING UP AGAIN, NEIL. WE'VE BEEN ORDERED TO TAKE UP POSITIONS SOUTH OF THE REICHSWALD FOREST! ABOUT TEN MILES FROM HERE.



SO IT WAS THE CONVOY SOON HALTED AND THE GLENSHIRE CLIMBED TO THE GROUND. FOR THE FIRST TIME, THEY HEARD THE DISTANT, OMINOUS BOOM OF ENEMY GUNFIRE.

WE'LL DO THE REST OF THE JOURNEY ON FOOT, IT'S ONLY A COUPLE OF MILES OR SO. GIVE US ALL A CHANCE TO GET THE STIFFNESS OUT OF OUR LEGS!

GOOD IDEA, SIR. IT SOUNDS LIKE JERRY'S LAYING DOWN A BARRAGE AND THESE TRUCKS MAKE AN EASY TARGET.



BUT NEIL CURRAN'S ANXIETY INCREASED WHEN HE SAW THE MANNER IN WHICH COLONEL FRASER PROPOSED TO LEAD HIS MEN TO THE FRONT.

A GOOD STIFF MARCH TO THE SKIRL OF THE PIPES. THAT'S WHAT WE ALL NEED, NEIL.

SIR, DON'T YOU THINK IT BEST IF WE SPREAD THE MEN OUT? IF ANYTHING SHOULD HAPPEN WHILST WE'RE ALL BUNCHED TOGETHER...



COLONEL FRASER SMILED AT THE YOUNGER MAN. HIS EYES SHONE WITH FIERCE PRIDE.



IT'S QUITE RIGHT THAT YOU SHOULD BE CAUTIOUS, NEIL. BUT THE PIPES WILL RAISE THE MEN'S FIGHTING SPIRIT. THE GLENSHIRE HAVE WAITED A LONG TIME FOR THIS MOMENT. LET'S NOT DISAPPOINT THEM.

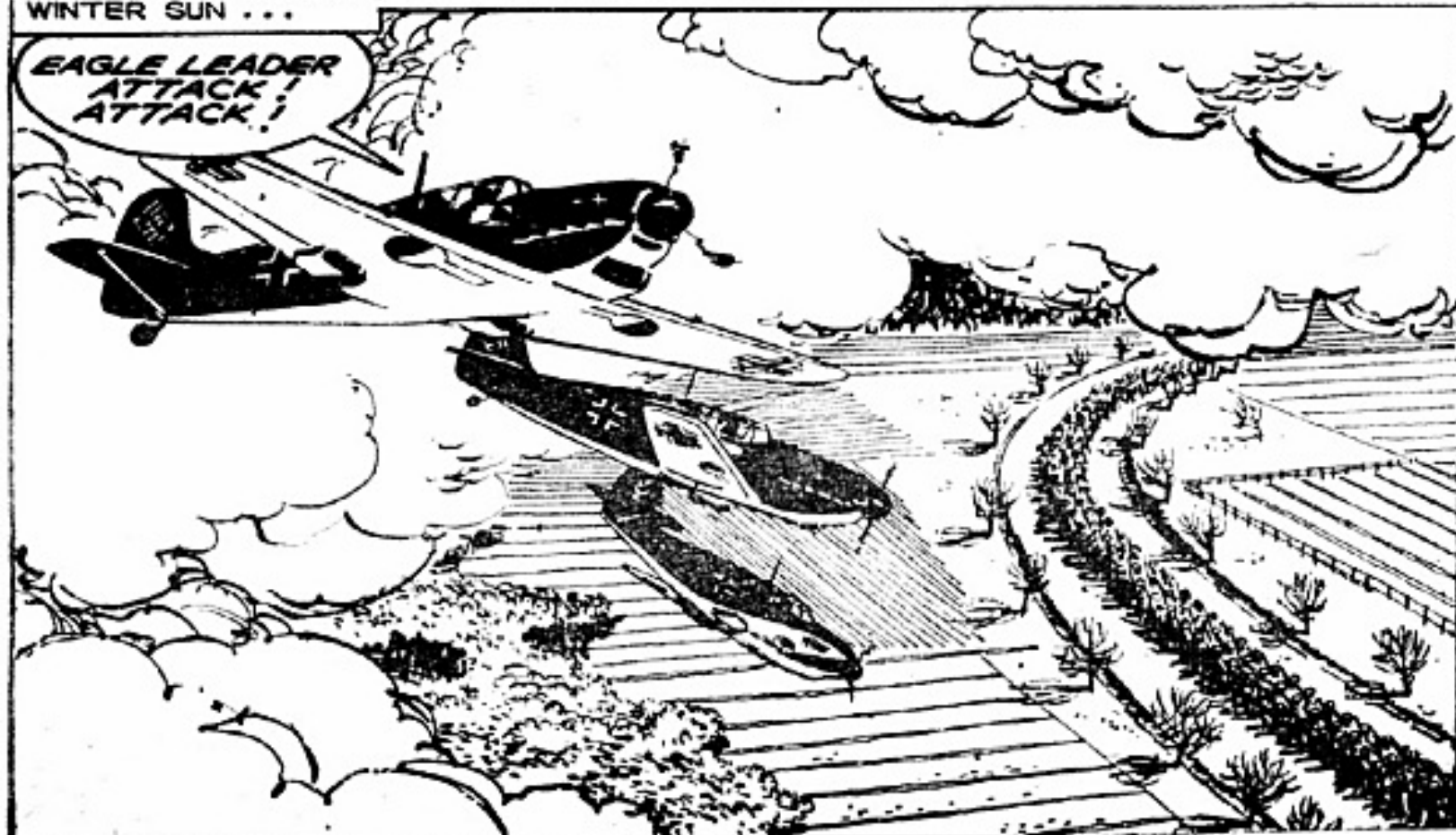
WITH SHOULDERS SQUARE AND ARMS SWINGING, THE GLENSHIRE'S MARCHED BRAVELY TOWARDS THE SOUND OF THE ENEMY GUNS.

HE MAY HAVE HIS FAULTS, BUT THE OLD BOY DOES UNDERSTAND HIS MEN. MAYBE IT WAS A GOOD IDEA AT THAT!

...AND WHEN HE GLANCED BACK AT THE MEN, CURRAN COULD SEE THAT ALREADY THEY HAD FORGOTTEN THE HUMILIATION OF BEING LEFT BEHIND WHEN THE OTHER REGIMENTS HAD INVADIED THE CONTINENT. MARCHING TO THE SKIRL OF THE PIPES THEY LOOKED LIKE SOLDIERS -- AND *FELT* LIKE FIGHTING MEN!

BUT HIGH ABOVE THE GLENSHIRE'S, THE LEADER OF A FLIGHT OF M.E. 109's GRINNED HARSHLY AS HE DIVED HIS FIGHTERS OUT OF THE PROTECTING GLARE OF THE WINTER SUN ...

EAGLE LEADER
ATTACK!
ATTACK!



THE ATTACKERS PLUMMETED DOWN SO SWIFTLY THAT ONLY WHEN LEADEN DEATH RAKED THROUGH THE RANKS DID THE GLENSHIRE REALISE THAT THE BATTLE HAD COME TO THEM ...




IT WAS NEIL CURRAN'S VOICE THAT ROSE ABOVE THE HAMMER OF MACHINE-GUNS, THE ROAR OF AIRCRAFT AND THE CRIES OF WOUNDED BORDERERS.

SCATTER!
INTO THE
DITCHES!
GET OFF
THE ROAD!



THE YOUNG SECOND-IN-COMMAND OF THE GLENSHIRE BORDERERS SPURTED TO WHERE A BREN GUN LAY ON THE SIDE OF THE ROAD BESIDE THE LIFELESS BODY OF ITS OWNER.

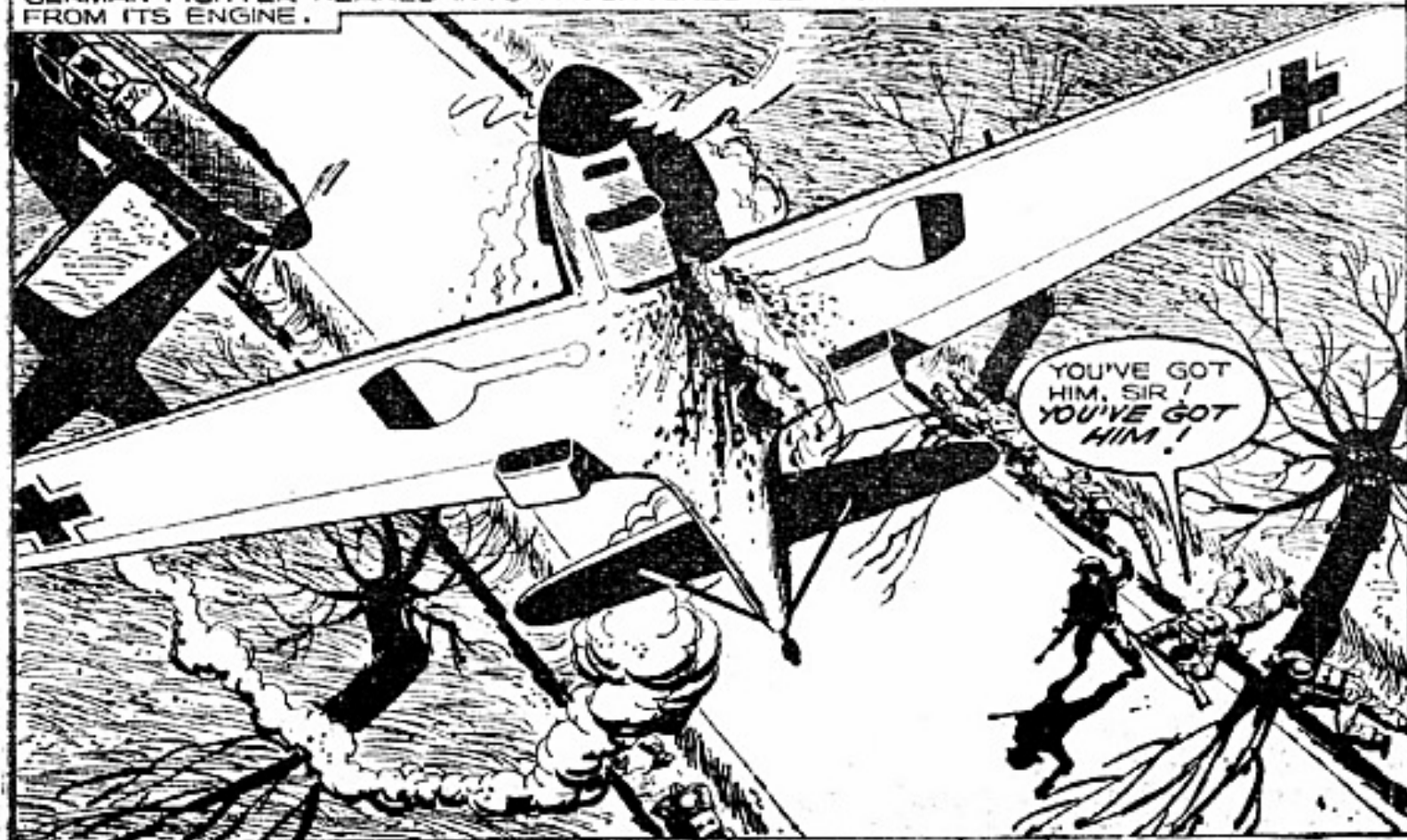
I TOLD HIM!
I WARNED THE OLD
MAN WHAT WOULD
HAPPEN!



AS THE SECOND MESSERSCHMITT STREAKED ABOVE THE ROAD, MAJOR CURRAN'S FINGER CLAMPED AGAINST THE TRIGGER AND A STREAM OF LEADEN FURY SWEEPED TO MEET IT.



THE BULLETS FROM THE BREN PUNCHED VICIOUSLY HOME AT THAT RANGE AND THE GERMAN FIGHTER REARED INTO A TORTURED CLIMB, SMOKE AND FLAME GUSHING FROM ITS ENGINE.



THE CRIPPLED FIGHTER WAS RIPPED APART AS THE FUEL TANKS EXPLODED AND BURNING FUEL GUSHED OVER THE FIRST MESSERSCHMITT THAT HAD BEEN CIRCLING TO MAKE ANOTHER ATTACK.



BUT THE DEVASTATING RESULT OF MAJOR CURRAN'S SHOOTING HAD RESTORED CONFIDENCE AND CALM TO THE GLENSHIRE'S AND THE THIRD ENEMY FIGHTER SHUDDERED AS IT FLEW THROUGH A HAIL OF SMALL ARMS FIRE.



THE LAST OF THE ENEMY FIGHTERS LIMPED AWAY, TO THE ACCOMPANIMENT OF CHEERS FROM THE FLUSHED AND EXCITED BORDERERS.

WE SHOWED THE BLIGHTERS! THAT'LL TEACH 'EM TO TANGLE WITH THE GLENSHIRE!

WHERE'S COLONEL FRASER?



THEN MAJOR CURRAN SAW HIS GREY-HAIRED C.O. CLIMB STIFFLY OUT OF A DITCH, CLUTCHING HIS ARM WITH RED-STREAKED FINGERS...

YOU'VE BEEN HIT, SIR!

IT'S NOTHING SERIOUS. SEE HOW MANY CASUALTIES THERE ARE, NEIL-- IT'S THE MEN I'M CONCERNED ABOUT.



NEIL CURRAN RETURNED A FEW MINUTES LATER, TO FIND HIS C.O. HELPING WITH THE WOUNDED.

IT'S PRETTY BAD, SIR. TEN MEN DEAD AND NEARLY THIRTY WOUNDED!

FORTY CASUALTIES! I LET MY MEN DOWN TODAY, NEIL -- BUT I'VE LEARNED MY LESSON. IT WON'T HAPPEN AGAIN!

SEEING THE PAIN AND MISERY IN THE OLD MAN'S EYES, NEIL FELT HIS ANGER EBB AWAY. HE TURNED HIS GAZE UPON THE GLENSHIRE'S CROUCHING BESIDE THE ROAD AND PEERING AT THE SKY WITH A NEW ALERTNESS.

IT WAS A TOUGH LESSON, SIR. BUT LOOK AT THE MEN NOW -- THAT SCRAP WITH THE MESSERSCHMITT HAS TURNED THEM FROM FRESH TROOPS INTO FIGHTING MEN.

BUT THEY'VE SO MUCH MORE TO LEARN -- ALL OF US HAVE ...



ABRUPTLY, COLONEL FRASER'S BLUE EYES LIFTED AND GAZED LEVELLY INTO THOSE OF HIS SECOND IN COMMAND...

NEIL, GIVE ME A FRANK ANSWER. DO YOU THINK I'M TOO OLD TO TAKE THESE LADS INTO BATTLE? DO YOU THINK MY REACTIONS WILL BE TOO SLOW? SHOULD I SWALLOW MY PRIDE AND TURN OVER MY COMMAND TO A YOUNGER MAN? TELL ME, NEIL. WHAT DO YOU THINK?



NEIL CURRAN KNEW THAT IF HE SPOKE THE BLUNT TRUTH IT WOULD BE THE SAME AS STABBING A KNIFE IN THE HEART OF A MAN HE HAD GROWN TO LOVE AS A FATHER.

I KNOW THIS, SIR. THAT NO COMMANDING OFFICER CAN THINK MORE OF HIS MEN THAN YOU DO. AS TO THE OTHER QUESTION -- WELL, YOU HAVEN'T HAD THE CHANCE YET TO PROVE ANYTHING EITHER WAY. I --- I THINK YOU SHOULD CONTINUE TO COMMAND, COLONEL.

THANK YOU, NEIL. NOW WE'LL FORGET THAT CONVERSATION. WE'VE GOT A LOT TO DO.



AS THE OLD MAN STRODE AWAY, MAJOR NEIL CURRAN CURSED HIMSELF FOR A WEAKLING AND A COWARD.

NOW THEN, LADS. THOSE WHO AREN'T WOUNDED FORM INTO TWO SINGLE COLUMNS -- ONE ON EACH SIDE OF THE ROAD. LET'S DO THINGS RIGHT FROM HERE ON.

IT WASN'T FAIR TO PUT IT TO ME LIKE THAT. HOW COULD I TELL HIM WHAT I **REALLY** THINK? IT WOULD HAVE DESTROYED HIM.



IT WAS NIGHT WHEN THE GLENSHIRE BORDERERS FILED SILENTLY INTO THEIR POSITIONS. A YOUNG LIEUTENANT FROM FIELD H.Q. HAD BEEN WAITING TO GUIDE THEM IN.



IN THE MOONLIGHT NEIL CURRAN SAW THAT THE COLONEL'S FACE WAS PALE AND STRAINED. HIS LEFT ARM DANGLED STIFFLY BY HIS SIDE.



Chapter 2. The Battle Begins

THE YOUNG LIEUTENANT DROVE NEIL CURRAN IN HIS JEEP TO A HEAVILY GUARDED DUG-OUT COMMAND POST IN THE CENTRE OF A THICK WOOD.

YOU'RE FROM THE THIRD GLENSHIRE'S? THEN COME IN. GENERAL CAMPBELL WANTS TO SEE YOU RIGHT AWAY.

GENERAL CAMPBELL WAS WELL INTO HIS FIFTIES -- BUT HIS KEEN BRAIN AND PIERCING EYES WERE THOSE OF A MAN UNTOUCHED BY AGE...

MAJOR CURRAN REPORTING, SIR, SECOND IN COMMAND OF THE THIRD GLENSHIRE'S.

MAJOR CURRAN? WHEN I SENT FOR THE SENIOR OFFICER, I EXPECTED YOUR C.O. WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH...?

THE G.O.C. BROKE OFF IN MID-SENTENCE AS THE FIELD TELEPHONE BEHIND HIM BUZZED HARSHLY.

YES, WHAT IS IT?
WHAT'S THAT...?
WHERE? WHERE?
GIVE ME A MAP
REFERENCE, MAN...!

THE GENERAL MADE SOME RAPID NOTES, SLAMMED THE RECEIVER BACK ON TO ITS HOOK, AND BECKONED HIS STAFF OFFICER URGENTLY TO THE MAP SPREAD BEFORE HIM.

IT SEEMS I WAS
RIGHT. THE ENEMY DO
INTEND TO MAKE A
STAND WITH THEIR BACKS
TO THE RHINE. IN THE
REICHSWALD, OUR PROBING
PATROLS RAN SMACK INTO
HEAVY-LINE DEFENCE.
TANKS, EIGHTY-EIGHTS,
HUNDREDS OF TROOPS
WELL DUG IN.

THAT MEANS
THEY'RE GOING TO
TRY AND HOLD THE
WHOLE LENGTH OF
THE SIEGFRIED
LINE, SIR.

WHAT'S THE ANSWER, SIR? A FRONTAL ATTACK TOGETHER WITH AN AIRBORNE DROP ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THEIR DEFENCE LINE?

G.H.Q. WILL DECIDE THAT. WHAT WE HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT IS OUR BIT OF THE REICHSWALD FOREST. IT'LL BE THE VERY DEVIL TO FLUSH THE HUN OUT OF THERE. TANKS WILL BE PRETTY WELL USELESS. NO, THIS IS GOING TO BE AN INFANTRYMAN'S BATTLE, AND THE SOONER WE LAUNCH IT THE BETTER.

THEN GENERAL CAMPBELL'S EYES FELL UPON NEIL CURRAN, STILL STANDING TO ATTENTION BEFORE HIM...

COLONEL ANGUS FRASER, SIR.

WELL, MAJOR CURRAN, YOU HAD BETTER HURRY BACK TO YOUR C.O. AND TELL HIM TO PREPARE FOR AN ATTACK AT DAWN TOMORROW. I'LL HAVE THE FULL ORDERS DELIVERED TO HIM IN AN HOUR OR SO. BY THE WAY, WHO DOES COMMAND THE THIRD GLENSHIRE? I DIDN'T TAKE NOTE OF HIS NAME.

GENERAL CAMPBELL GAVE AN INCREDULOUS GASP ...

ANGUS FRASER!
DOES HE **STILL**
COMMAND? I THOUGHT
HE'D RETIRED ---LONG
AGO! IT CAN'T BE
THE SAME MAN!

COLONEL FRASER HAS
BEEN C.O. OF THE REGIMENT
FOR OVER TWENTY YEARS,
SIR. SO IT MUST BE THE
SAME MAN.



SILENCE FELL AS THE G.O.C. TUGGED SCOWLINGLY AT HIS BONY JAW AND GLARED AT THE YOUNG GLENSHIRE OFFICER. THEN ...

I KNOW COLONEL FRASER.
HE'S A DECENT FELLOW--
AND AS A MAN I LIKE HIM.
BUT HE IS OLD NOW! I CAN'T
LET AN OLD MAN LEAD MEN
INTO THE REICHSWALD FOREST.
IT'LL BE MURDER. HE'S GOT
TO BE REPLACED ---
AT ONCE!

BUT, GENERAL, IF
WE'VE TO ATTACK
TOMORROW, WE NEED
THE GLENSHIRE! WHO
CAN WE FIND AT SUCH
SHORT NOTICE TO RELIEVE
HIM? WE CAN'T GIVE
COMMAND TO A MAN WHO
DOESN'T EVEN KNOW
THE **NAMES** OF THE
MEN UNDER HIM!



GENERAL CAMPBELL'S REPLY WAS CURT AND FINAL -- AND HE ADDRESSED IT TO MAJOR NEIL CURRAN.

I KNOW THAT, AND I'VE ALREADY DECIDED WHO'LL TAKE OVER FROM ANGUS FRASER. YOU, MAJOR CURRAN! AS FROM NOW, YOU ARE COMMANDING OFFICER OF THE THIRD GLENSHIRE BORDERERS. I UNDERSTAND MEN -- **YOU'RE** THE RIGHT MAN FOR THE JOB!

ME!
SIR!
BUT...
BUT...!

THE GENERAL PAID NO HEED AT ALL TO NEIL CURRAN'S STAMMERING WORDS...

HAVE A DOCUMENT MADE OUT IMMEDIATELY TO THE EFFECT THAT MAJOR NEIL CURRAN IS PROMOTED TO LIEUTENANT-COLONEL AND IS TO COMMAND THE THIRD GLENSHIRE AS FROM THIS MOMENT. CURRAN CAN DELIVER THE PAPER TO ANGUS FRASER HIMSELF.

YES, SIR. I'LL SEE TO IT AT ONCE.

WITHOUT ANOTHER WORD, GENERAL CAMPBELL STALKED OUT OF THE DUGOUT.

CONGRATULATIONS, MAJOR --- I MEAN COLONEL CURRAN.

BUT HOW CAN I BRING MYSELF TO TELL HIM? HOW CAN I FACE HIM?

CARRYING THE DOCUMENT WHICH MEANT SO MUCH TO HIS ARMY CAREER, AND THE END TO COLONEL FRASER'S, NEIL CURRAN WAS DRIVEN BACK TO WHAT WAS NOW *HIS* REGIMENT.

GOOD LUCK, SIR!

THERE HE IS. I'VE GOT TO TELL HIM NOW.



COLONEL FRASER LOOKED UP EAGERLY AS NEIL CURRAN APPROACHED.



THE OLD MAN GAVE A WRY SMILE.



AS HE STARTED AFTER THE STRAIGHT-BACKED FIGURE OF THE OLD SOLDIER, NEIL CURRAN KNEW SUDDENLY WHAT HE MUST DO.

IN THAT CASE, I'LL MAKE THE ROUNDS OF THE PLATOON LEADERS. YOU GET YOURSELF A BITE TO EAT AND JOIN ME LATER.

I'M NOT GOING TO TAKE THAT CHANCE AWAY FROM HIM. I DON'T CARE WHAT HAPPENS TO MY OWN CAREER, I'M NOT GOING TO DO THIS TO HIM.



ONE THING HAD TO BE DONE IMMEDIATELY -- THE SIGNALS SERGEANT HAD TO BE TOLD OF NEIL CURRAN'S PLANS.

FORGIVE ME, SIR, BUT I HOPE YOU REALISE WHAT YOU ARE LETTING YOURSELF IN FOR. G.H.Q. IS BOUND TO FIND OUT.

I KNOW THAT, SERGEANT, BUT I'M GOING THROUGH WITH IT. WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO --- IS TO MAKE SURE THAT COLONEL FRASER NEVER CONTACTS G.H.Q. HIMSELF! ONLY ME!



TWO HOURS LATER, A DISPATCH RIDER BROUGHT THE DETAILS OF THE ATTACK FROM GENERAL CAMPBELL.

OUR BIG GUNS WILL LAY DOWN A HEAVY BARRAGE ON THE REICHSWALD AT 0-FOUR-THIRTY HOURS. WE GO IN ONE HOUR LATER AND MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO ESTABLISH OURSELVES ON A HILL ABOUT A MILE INSIDE THE FOREST. THEY'VE GIVEN US A MAP REFERENCE, SO WE SHOULDN'T HAVE ANY TROUBLE FINDING IT!

FINDING THE HILL IS ONE THING, SIR. TAKING THE HILL IS ANOTHER. BUT WE'LL DO OUR UTMOST.

COLONEL FRASER NODDED ABSENTLY, THEN FROWNED AGAIN AT THE ORDERS...

YES, WE CAN ONLY DO OUR BEST, NEIL! ---HALLO--- I'VE JUST NOTICED! THESE ORDERS ARE MADE OUT TO **LIEUTENANT-COLONEL NEIL CURRAN**, COMMANDING OFFICER OF THE GLENSHIRE BORDERERS.

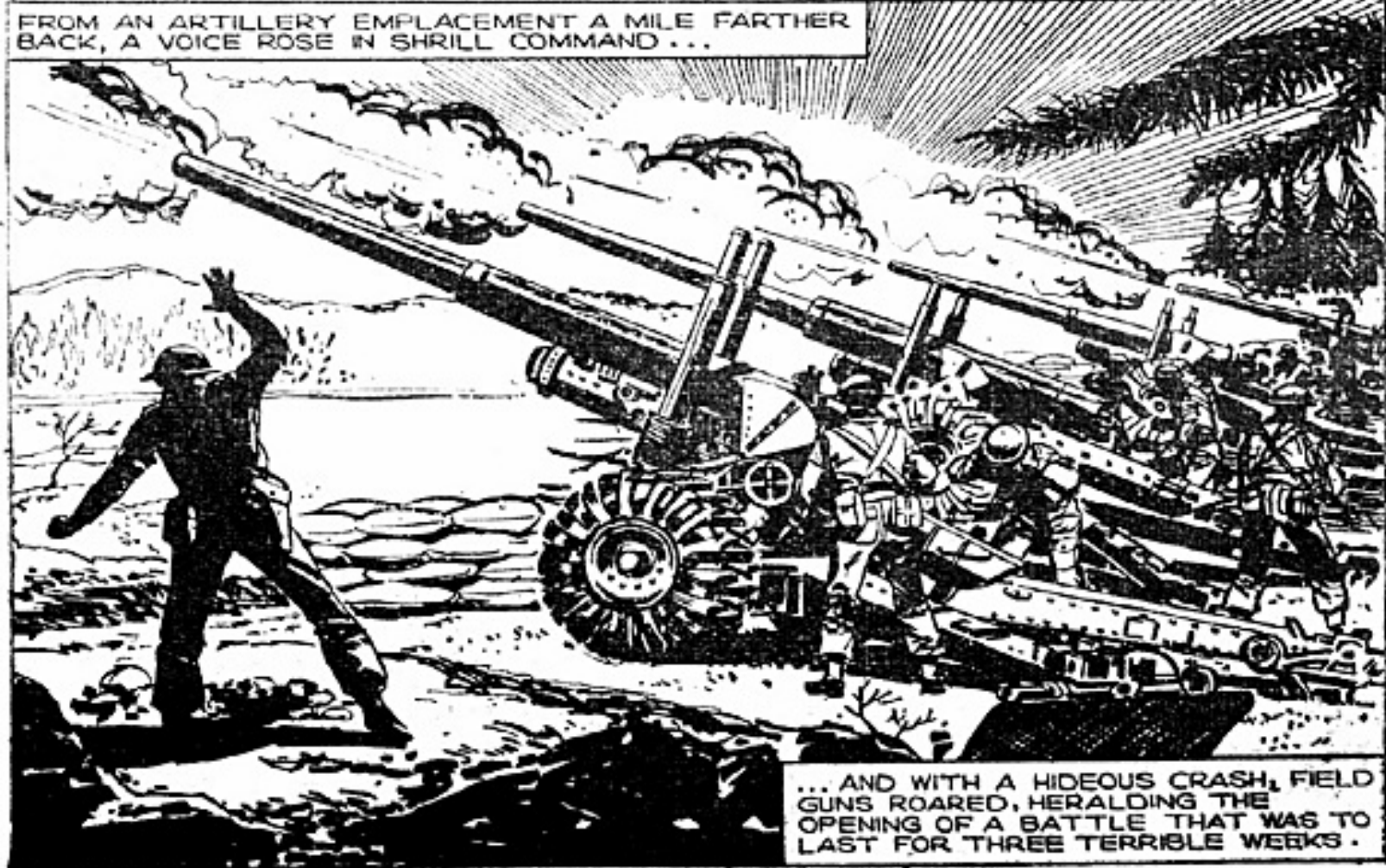
OBVIOUSLY A CLERK'S ERROR, SIR. I SUPPOSE IT WAS BECAUSE I REPORTED TO GENERAL CAMPBELL INSTEAD OF YOU. IT'S EASY TO SEE HOW IT HAPPENED. HADN'T WE BETTER GET TO MORE IMPORTANT THINGS NOW, SIR?

...WITH THAT SMALL LIE, NEIL CURRAN'S PLAN OF DECEPTION WAS SET IN OPERATION.

0429 HOURS. IN THE COLD LIGHT OF THE FIRST DAWN, THE GLENSHIRE BORDERERS PEERED AT THE DARK MASS OF THE REICHSWALD FOREST. THEIR BATTLE STRATEGY HAD BEEN DECIDED... AND NOW THEY WAITED FOR THE FIRST PHASE OF THE ATTACK TO BEGIN...



FROM AN ARTILLERY EMPLACEMENT A MILE FARTHER BACK, A VOICE ROSE IN SHRILL COMMAND...



... AND WITH A HIDEOUS CRASH, FIELD GUNS ROARED, HERALDING THE OPENING OF A BATTLE THAT WAS TO LAST FOR THREE TERRIBLE WEEKS.

FROM BEHIND THEIR COVER, THE GLENSHIRE WATCHED THE BARRAGE TEAR AND SHATTER THE FRINGES OF THE FOREST. THEN COLONEL FRASER GLANCED AT HIS WATCH.

TWO MINUTES TO GO, NEIL. AS WE AGREED, 'A' SECTION WILL SPEARHEAD THE ADVANCE, 'B' AND 'C' SECTIONS COVERING THEIR FLANKS.

I'VE JUST CHECKED, SIR. THEY'RE ALL READY IN POSITION.



ABRUPTLY THE BARRAGE STOPPED AND THE GLENSHIRE BEGAN THEIR ASSAULT ON THE REICHSWALD FOREST.

NOT A SOUND FROM THE JERRIES. MAYBE OUR BIG GUNS CHANGED THEIR MINDS ABOUT HOLDING OUT!

I HOPE YOU'RE RIGHT, PETE. BUT TO ME IT SEEMS 700 BLOOMING QUIET!



THEN, FROM DUG-IN POSITIONS ALONG THE EDGE OF THE FOREST, SPANDAUS BEGAN THEIR SHRILL CLAMOUR OF HATE, HURLING A HAIL OF LEAD INTO THE RANKS OF THE ADVANCING GLENSHIRE.



THE BRITISH BARRAGE HAD BEEN SEVERE BUT THE ENEMY DEFENCE LINE WAS FAR FROM BROKEN.

CAUGHT OUT IN THE OPEN GROUND, THE GLENSHIRE'S ADVANCE FALTERED AGAINST THAT TERRIBLE CURTAIN OF STEEL-JACKETED DEATH.



THEY'RE CUTTING US TO PIECES!

IT WAS NEIL CURRAN WHO PREVENTED PANIC TURNING THE ADVANCE INTO A FEAR-CRAZED RETREAT. HIS VOICE RANG OUT ABOVE THE CLAMOUR OF MACHINE-GUN FIRE... URGING THEM ONWARDS.

KEEP GOING,
MEN! IT'S TOO LATE
TO TURN BACK! KEEP
GOING! IT'S OUR
ONLY CHANCE!

THE SPEARHEAD SECTION OF THE
GLENSHIRES FOLLOWED THE
YOUNG OFFICER IN A DESPERATE
DASH FOR THE SHELL-SPLINTERED
TREES AT THE FRINGES OF THE
FOREST.



SOBBING FOR BREATH, THE GLENSHIRE GRATEFULLY HUDDLED BEHIND SHELTERING TREES -- BUT STILL THE AIR HISSED AND CRACKLED UNDER THE FURY OF GERMAN FIRE.

IT'S NO USE
HANGING ON HERE.
THE GERMANS HAVE
US PINNED DOWN.
WE'VE GOT TO KEEP
MOVING.

AGAIN, THE YOUNG OFFICER'S COMMAND RANG OUT ABOVE THE DIN OF BATTLE, AND AGAIN THE GLENSHIRE ROSE TO FOLLOW HIM.

FOLLOW ME,
GLENSHIRE! WE'VE
GOT TO WIPE OUT
THOSE MACHINE-
GUNS!

THE SHRILL YAMMERING OF SPANDAUS GREW LOUDER AND MORE FRANTIC AS KHAKI-CLAD FIGURES CONTINUED TO ADVANCE. BUT NOW THE GLENSHIRE'S COULD SEE THE MEN THEY WERE FIGHTING AGAINST -- AND FIERCE DETERMINATION TOOK THE PLACE OF FEAR.



THE LINE OF MACHINE-GUN NESTS HAD BEEN OVER-RUN, BUT IT WAS ONLY THE THIN OUTER EDGE OF THE GERMAN DEFENCES. FROM FARTHER INSIDE THE FOREST THERE CAME THE EAR-SPLITTING CRACK OF AN EVEN MORE DEADLY MENACE...



AS THE MENACING MUZZLE OF THE MACHINE-GUN SWUNG FRANTICALLY TOWARDS HIM, NEIL CURRAN FLUNG HIMSELF TO ONE SIDE -- AND HIS ARM SWUNG IN AN ARC AS HE HURLED A GRENADE.



THE GRENADE EXPLODED AMIDST THE GERMANS AND THE SPANDAU SPLUTTERED INTO SILENCE. THE FATE OF THE CREW OF THE 88 M.M. WAS SEALED.



SAVED FROM FURTHER SHELL-FIRE BY THE PROMPT ACTION OF NEIL CURRAN AND HIS MEN, THE REMAINDER OF THE GLENSHIRE REACHED THE FRINGE OF THE REICHSWALD.

KEEP GOING
TILL WE JOIN
UP WITH 'A'
SECTION!

BUT FROM THE DEPTHS OF THE WOODS ENEMY MACHINE-GUNS AND RIFLES STILL KEPT UP A HARROWING FIRE.

COLONEL FRASER AND THE MEN WITH HIM WERE FORCED TO FIND COVER. IT WAS THEN THAT NEIL REJOINED THEM...

HELLO, NEIL. WE'VE
STIRRED UP A REAL
HORNETS' NEST, EH?
HOW DID YOUR
SECTION MAKE
OUT?

I'M AFRAID WE
LOST QUITE A FEW
MEN, SIR. BUT THE LADS
HAVE PROVED MORE THAN
A MATCH FOR THE
GERMANS SO FAR!

INSTINCTIVELY, THE OLDER MAN DUCKED AS A STREAM OF TRACER SPLINTERED THE TREES JUST ABOVE HIM. NEIL CURRAN EYED HIM ANXIOUSLY.

IT'S BAD ENOUGH HERE, SIR. BUT WE MUSTN'T FORGET OUR OBJECTIVE.

I KNOW, NEIL. WE'VE GOT TO TAKE THE HILL! WE'LL GIVE THE LAOS A LITTLE MORE TIME TO CATCH THEIR BREATHS-- THEN WE'LL GO IN AGAIN.

THEN, ABRUPTLY, THE HAMMERING OF THE GERMAN GUNS CEASED. THE GLENSHIRE FIDGETED UNEASILY IN THE UNCANNY SILENCE, PEERING VAINLY INTO THE DARK SHADOWS OF THE FOREST.

WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF IT, NEIL? THEY HAVEN'T FIRED A SINGLE SHOT IN FIVE MINUTES!

I JUST DON'T KNOW, SIR. MAYBE THEY'VE HAD ENOUGH, BUT SOMEHOW I DON'T THINK SO. THE ONLY THING IS TO GO IN AND FIND OUT.



AS THE GLENSHIRE'S CAUTIOUSLY MOVED ON DEEPER INTO THE FOREST, A GERMAN OFFICER LOWERED HIS FIELD GLASSES WITH A GRIN OF SATISFACTION.

HERE THEY COME! LIKE SHEEP TO THE SLAUGHTER! RIGHT, HERLICH... GIVE THE FIRE ORDER.

JAWOHL, HERR HAUPTMANN! ENEMY IN POSITION! FEUER!



FOUR HUNDRED YARDS BACK, A BATTERY OF ENEMY MORTARS TRIGGERED OFF WITH A DEAFENING ROAR --- HURLING THEIR MOANING LETHAL CHARGES IN A LONG ARC ABOVE THE TREE TOPS.



THE NOISE OF THE BOMBS' FLIGHT ROSE TO A HOWL AS THEY DESCENDED -- THEN THE FOREST ABOUT THE GLENSHIRE ROCKED AND SPLINTERED IN AN INFERNO OF FLAME, SMOKE AND SCREAMING SHRAPNEL.



FRANTICALLY, THE INFANTRYMEN HUGGED THE EARTH, BUT THERE WAS NO PROTECTION FROM THE DESTRUCTION THAT RAINED DOWN UPON THEM ...

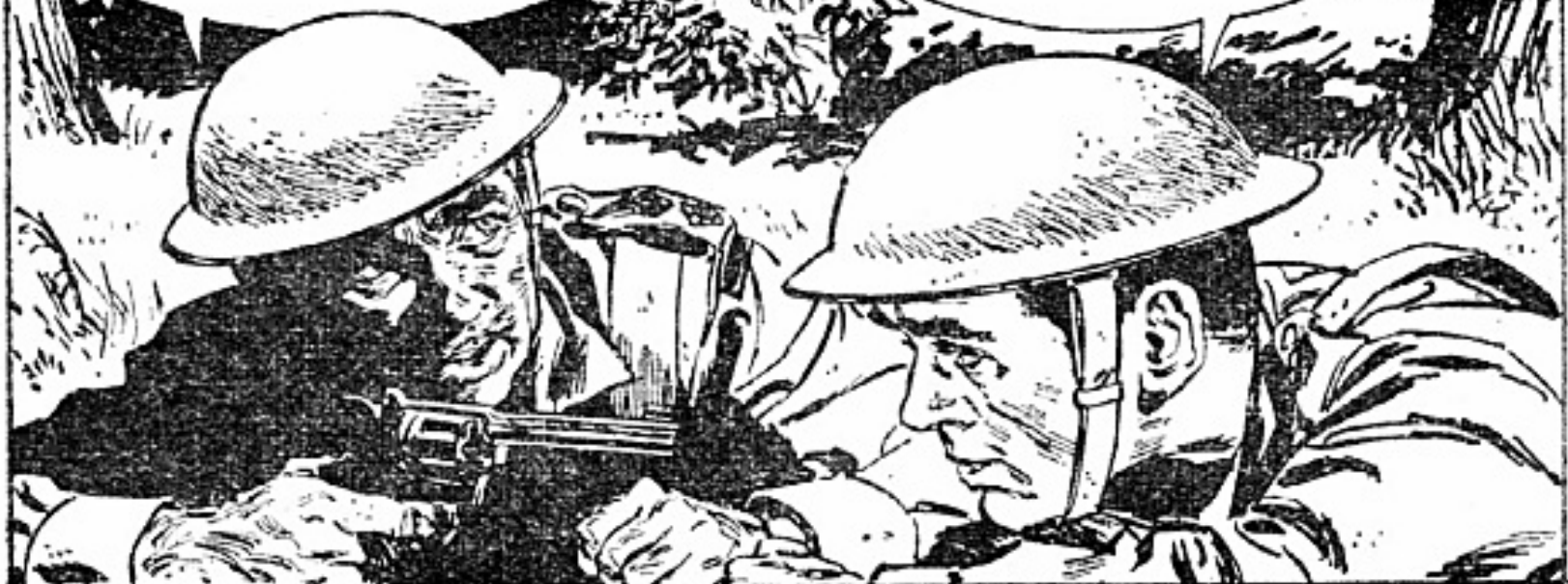


...FOR APART FROM STEEL SHRAPNEL, DEATH CAME FROM THE TREE SPLINTERS WHICH WERE SENT FLYING THROUGH THE AIR WITH TERRIBLE FORCE.

THERE WAS AGONY IN COLONEL FRASER'S EYES AS HE LOOKED ABOUT HIM -- NOT BROUGHT ON BY PERSONAL FEAR BUT BY THE SIGHT OF THE HAVOC WREAKED AMONG HIS MEN.

COMMAND CAN'T HAVE KNOWN THE GERMANS WOULD BE SO STRONG. THEY'RE OBVIOUSLY GOING TO THROW IN EVERYTHING THEY'VE GOT TO STOP US CROSSING THE RHINE. CAN GENERAL CAMPBELL STILL EXPECT ME TO TRY TO REACH OUR OBJECTIVE?

WE CAN TRY, SIR. I DOUBT IF MORE THAN A HANDFUL OF US WOULD GET THROUGH. I THINK THE GENERAL SHOULD BE TOLD WHAT WE ARE UP AGAINST! MAYBE HE'LL DECIDE TO PULL US BACK AND SHELL THE FOREST AGAIN BEFORE WE HAVE ANOTHER TRY!



IN GENERAL CAMPBELL'S COMMAND POST, A TENSE SIGNALLER SWUNG ROUND FROM THE RADIO...

RED SECTOR ON THE RADIO. THE C.O. WANTS TO REPORT TO YOU PERSONALLY, SIR.



RED SECTOR? THAT'S THE GLENSHIRE -- YOUNG CURRAN! CAN HE HAVE REACHED THE OBJECTIVE ALREADY? OR HAS HE STUMBLER INTO A SOLID WALL OF HUN -- JUST AS IN THE OTHER SECTORS?

GENERAL CAMPBELL LISTENED INTENTLY TO THE FAINT, CRACKLING VOICE AT THE OTHER END OF THE FIELD RADIO. HIS REPLY WAS CURT AND SEEMINGLY EMOTIONLESS...

I KNOW WHAT IT MUST BE LIKE FOR YOU OUT THERE, RED SECTOR. BUT I CAN'T DRAW BACK. YOU'VE GOT TO KEEP TRYING FOR YOUR OBJECTIVE. REPEAT, YOU MUST ATTACK, AND KEEP ON ATTACKING UNTIL YOU TAKE IT!



GOING BY YOUR REPLY, SIR, I GATHER THE GLENSHIRE'S ARE IN FOR A BAD TIME.

YES. BUT IF WE CAN HOLD A CLEAR LINE TO THAT HILL WE STAND A GOOD CHANCE OF BREAKING UP THE GERMAN'S DEFENCE LINE. THOUSANDS OF OUR MEN'S LIVES WILL BE SAVED IF THE GLENSHIRE'S CAN DO WHAT I ASK!



GENERAL CAMPBELL PAUSED, SEEING IN HIS MIND THE YOUNG OFFICER HE HAD SO RECENTLY PROMOTED TO COLONEL. THEN, WITH SUDDEN HELPLESS FURY, HE CRASHED HIS FIST DOWN ON THE TABLE.

IF ONLY I HAD ANOTHER BATTLE-EXPERIENCED REGIMENT I COULD SEND IN THEIR PLACE. IF YOU COULD HAVE HEARD YOUNG CURRAN, HIS VOICE, IT SOUNDED SO DIFFERENT—LIKE AN OLD MAN!



Chapter 3. No Retreat

IN THE REICHSWALD FOREST, COLONEL FRASER LOOKED GRIMLY AT NEIL CURRAN ...

WE'VE GOT TO GO ON, NEIL. THERE'S NO TURNING BACK!

THEN, FOR THE MEN'S SAKE, I'VE GOT TO CALL A HALT TO THIS DECEPTION. I'VE GOT TO TELL HIM THAT *I'M* REALLY IN COMMAND. IF GENERAL CAMPBELL'S RIGHT, IF HE'S REALLY TOO OLD TO COMMAND, THEN I'M PLAYING WITH THE MEN'S LIVES! I MUST TELL HIM *NOW!*

BUT BEFORE NEIL CURRAN COULD SPEAK, COLONEL FRASER GAVE A SUDDEN START-- AND PULLED THE MAP OF THE AREA FROM HIS POCKET ...

WAIT A MINUTE, NEIL! THERE MIGHT BE A WAY WE CAN GET TO THAT HILL-- *AND* CUT DOWN OUR CASUALTIES! LET'S HAVE A LOOK AT THAT MAP.

SIR, THERE'S SOMETHING I MUST TELL YOU ...

BUT COLONEL FRASER DID NOT EVEN HEAR NEIL CURRAN SPEAK. HIS EYES WERE KEENLY SEARCHING THE MAP, AND HIS VOICE HELD A NEW NOTE OF STRENGTH AND CONFIDENCE.

PUT YOURSELF IN THE MIND OF THE ENEMY COMMANDER. YOU WOULD CERTAINLY DECIDE, AS HE HAS DONE, THAT THE HILL WILL BE A MAIN OBJECTIVE. RIGHT, NEIL?

OF COURSE, SIR. THAT'S WHY HE'S BUILT UP SUCH A STRONG DEFENCE HERE!

COLONEL FRASER'S FINGER STABBED DOWN AT A POINT ON THE MAP...

WELL, I'M GOING TO TAKE A SECTION FARTHER DOWN THE FOREST AND ATTACK AT ANOTHER POINT. AS IF OUR OBJECTIVE WERE THIS FARMHOUSE THAT'S MARKED ON THE MAP. WE'LL SLIP DOWN THERE UNDER COVER OF ALL THIS SMOKE -- THEN ATTACK WITH AS MUCH NOISE AS WE CAN.

YOU MEAN YOU'LL TRY TO DRAW THE ENEMY AWAY FROM THIS SECTION?

EXACTLY! I'LL COMMAND THE DECOY ASSAULT. YOU GIVE ME ONE HOUR, THEN LEAD THE REST OF THE MEN IN ANOTHER ATTACK ON THAT HILL.

BUT YOUR SIDE OF THE PLAN WILL BE TOO DANGEROUS, SIR. YOU'LL BE UNDERSTRENGTH! WHAT IF THE GERMANS COUNTER-ATTACK AGAINST YOU?

THE GREY-HAIRED OFFICER SMILED ...

I'LL HAVE TO TAKE THAT RISK, NEIL. BUT YOU'RE THE ONLY MAN TO TAKE IN THE REAL ASSAULT. I'VE GOT AN OLD HEAD ON MY SHOULDERS -- BUT ALREADY I'M BEGINNING TO REALISE THAT I'M PAST FOOTSLOGGING THROUGH FORESTS. MAYBE THIS *IS* A YOUNG MAN'S WAR, AFTER ALL.

A FEW MINUTES LATER, COLONEL FRASER AND HIS MEN BEGAN TO SLIP QUIETLY AWAY -- HIDDEN BY THE SMOKE FROM THE BURNING TREES.

GOOD LUCK, SIR!

AND GOOD LUCK TO YOU AND YOUR MEN, NEIL. I KNOW YOU'LL DO YOUR UTMOST TO TAKE THAT HILL.

NEIL CURRAN AND THE REMAINDER OF THE GLENSHIRE KEPT UP A STEADY FIRE AGAINST THE GERMANS. THEN, FROM THEIR LEFT FLANK, CAME THE SUDDEN CRASH OF BREN GUNS, RIFLES AND EXPLODING GRENADES.

COLONEL FRASER, AND THE REST OF THE BLOKES ARE KICKING UP A HECK OF A RACKET, SIR!

THAT'S THE WHOLE IDEA, SERGEANT. THEY'RE TRYING TO KEEP THE JERRIES BUSY!



AT THAT MOMENT, COLONEL FRASER RAISED HIMSELF FROM BEHIND COVER. HIS EYES GLANCED PROUDLY OVER THE TENSE, WAITING GLENSHIRE.

THIS IS IT, LADS! WE'VE GOT TO MAKE THINGS AS HOT FOR JERRY AS WE CAN!



YELLING HOARSELY, FIRING AS THEY RAN, THE DECOY SECTION CHARGED THROUGH THE SMOKE-FILLED FOREST TOWARDS THE GERMAN POSITIONS.



AS COLONEL FRASER'S MEN RUSHED FROM COVER, A GERMAN OFFICER SHOUTED CLUT ORDERS.

THE BRITISHERS
ARE ATTACKING!
FIRE! DRIVE
THEM BACK!



FROM ALL ALONG THE GERMAN ENTRENCHMENTS, GUN-FLAME STABBED TOWARDS THE ATTACKING GLENSHIRE. COLONEL FRASER SAW HIS MEN FLINCH AND FALTER...



THE GLENSHIRE WHO SURVIVED THAT SHORT, MURDEROUS DASH THROUGH THE FOREST KNEW THAT IT WAS ONLY THE FEARLESS GALLANTRY OF COLONEL FRASER THAT HAD GIVEN THEM THE COURAGE TO CONTINUE. BUT, SOMEHOW, THEY REACHED THE FIRST OF THE GERMAN DEFENCE LINES...



WHILE HIS MEN MOPPED UP THE GERMANS THAT STILL RESISTED, COLONEL FRASER LEANED WEAKLY AGAINST THE PARAPET, HIS CHEST HEAVING WITH EXHAUSTION.



BUT THAT TERRIBLE ORDEAL OF FIRE HAD NOT BEEN IN VAIN. COLONEL FRASER'S DECOY PLAN HAD BEGUN TO WORK.



THE ENEMY GENERAL CAME TO THE VERY CONCLUSION COLONEL FRASER HAD HOPED FOR.

THEN THE BRITISH MUST HAVE LEARNED I WAS USING THE FARMHOUSE AS MY FIELD HEADQUARTERS. THEIR ATTACK TOWARDS THE HILL WAS ONLY A FEINT.

FRANTIC ORDERS WERE PASSED TO THE SAME ENEMY MORTAR BATTERY THAT HAD GROUND DOWN THE GLENSHIRE'S FIRST ATTACK.

THE BRITISH ARE ATTEMPTING THEIR MAIN BREAK THROUGH TO OUR RIGHT. CHANGE YOUR TARGET IMMEDIATELY!

A MINUTE LATER, THE FURY OF THE ENEMY MORTAR BARRAGE RAINED DOWN UPON COLONEL FRASER'S GALLANT FORCE COWERING IN THEIR CAPTURED TRENCH.



AT ANOTHER POINT IN THE REICHSWALD, NEIL CURRAN'S MEN HEARD THE DISTANT EXPLOSIONS AS MORTAR BOMBS POURED DOWN UPON THEIR COMRADES' POSITION.

THEY'RE TAKING THAT POUNDING SO THAT **WE** CAN CAPTURE THAT HILL IN FRONT OF US! IT'S UP TO US TO MAKE SURE THEIR COURAGE ISN'T WASTED!

THE JERRIES ARE CHUCKING EVERYTHING AT THEM, SIR! IT MUST BE SHEER MURDER THERE!



AS THE GERMAN BARRAGE REACHED ITS PEAK, NEIL CURRAN LEAPT TO HIS FEET, WAVING TO THE GLENSHIRE'S TO FOLLOW HIM ...



GRIMLY, SILENTLY, THE BATTLE-GRIMED GLENSHIRE'S RAN THROUGH THE FOREST -- KNOWING THAT ONLY HARD, SWIFT ACTION AND DOGGED COURAGE COULD TAKE THEM THROUGH THE GERMAN DEFENCE.



DESPERATELY, THE GERMANS TRIED TO SHATTER THE BRITISH ATTACK. A MERCILESS HAIL OF FIRE SWEEP THE GLENSHIRE'S RANKS.



...BUT EVEN THOUGH A COMRADE DROPPED FOR EVERY YARD OF THE ADVANCE, THE GLENSHIRE'S KEPT GOING.

VALIANTLY, THE GLENSHIRE'S SWEEP THROUGH THE WITHERING CURTAIN OF FIRE AND MET THEIR ENEMY IN FEROCIOUS CLOSE COMBAT.



AT LAST THEY PUNCHED THROUGH THE GERMAN DEFENCE LINE AND, AHEAD OF HIM, THROUGH THE TREES, NEIL CURRAN SAW THEIR OBJECTIVE.



THEY MET ONLY SLIGHT RESISTANCE ON THE SLOPES OF THE HILL -- BUT NEIL CURRAN KNEW THAT THE WORST WAS YET TO COME ...



BUT THE GERMANS DID NOT COUNTER-ATTACK. A MINUTE LATER, THEIR MORTARS WERE SENDING A RAIN OF BOMBS ON TO THE SUMMIT OF THE GLENSHIRE'S HILL ...



AGAINST INFANTRY UNITS THE GLENSHIRE'S COULD FIGHT BACK. BUT AGAINST THAT MERCILESS BARRAGE THEY COULD DO NOTHING BUT HUG THE GROUND -- AND WAIT ...

WE CAN'T HOLD OUT MUCH LONGER, SIR. WE NEED REINFORCEMENTS!

I KNOW, SERGEANT. THE SECOND WAVE SHOULD HAVE REACHED US BY NOW, BUT THERE'S NOT A SIGN OF THEM! PITY OUR RADIO WAS DAMAGED.



STILL THE SAVAGE BOMBARDMENT CONTINUED. THEN THROUGH THE FOREST, THE BESIEGED GLENSHIRE'S SAW WAVES OF GERMAN INFANTRY ADVANCING TOWARDS THE HILL.



AGAINST THE SHARP CHATTER OF SMALL ARMS, NEIL CURRAN SPOKE URGENTLY INTO THE RADIO TO GENERAL CAMPBELL.



GENERAL CAMPBELL GAVE A GASP OF RELIEF. BUT HIS WORDS WERE COLD, CLIPPED AND CONFIDENT...



GENERAL CAMPBELL'S PLAN SEEMED TO BE THE ONLY HOPE FOR THE BRITISH ON THE TOP OF THE HILL. THEN, WITH HORROR, NEIL REMEMBERED...



WITH HEAVY HEARTS THE GLENSHIRE'S WATCHED THEIR OWN ARTILLERY THROW A BLANKET OF STEEL UPON THE GERMANS -- AND, THEY FEARED, UPON THEIR OWN COMRADES...



AT LAST THE BRITISH BARRAGE LIFTED AND A GLENSHIRE ROSE TO HIS FEET AND POINTED ACROSS THE SHATTERED FOREST ...

LOOK, SIR,
HERE COME THE
REINFORCEMENTS!

ONLY A FEW GERMANS HAD SURVIVED THE SHELL FIRE, AND EVEN THOSE HAD ALL THE FIGHT KNOCKED OUT OF THEM.



THE TWO BRITISH UNITS LINKED FORCES. THE HILL WAS NOW SECURE..

WE'LL TAKE OVER NOW! YOUR LADS ARE BOUND FOR A REST CAMP AT REICHSWALD-- AND YOU'VE CERTAINLY EARNED IT.

THANKS! BUT WE'LL TAKE A LOOK FOR THE REST OF THE GLENSHIRE'S ON THE WAY.



THE SURVIVORS OF THE SIEGE LEFT THE HILL THAT HAD BEEN THE SUBJECT OF SUCH A BITTER BATTLE. THEY STUMBLED THROUGH THE SMOKING FOREST -- CALLING AT THE TOP OF THEIR VOICES.

GLENSHIRE'S!
COLONEL FRASER! WHERE ARE YOU??

IF ONLY WE KNEW WHERE THEY'D REACHED.



WITH DIMINISHED HOPES, THEY CONTINUED THE SEARCH, BUT STILL THERE WAS NO SIGN OF COLONEL FRASER'S PARTY.

DO YOU THINK THEY'VE BEEN TAKEN PRISONER, SIR?

I'M BEGINNING TO HOPE THAT'S WHAT *HAS* HAPPENED, SERGEANT.

SUDDENLY, FROM A RUBBLE OF UPFLUNG EARTH AND WRECKED SANDBAGS CAME A FAINT CRY...

HERE!
HERE!

IT'S THEM!

ONE OF THEM, ANYWAY!
BUT WHAT OF COLONEL FRASER--
AND THE OTHERS!

BUT THERE WERE MORE MEN ALIVE THAN NEIL CURRAN HAD EVEN DARED TO HOPE. ALTHOUGH THEY WERE STILL DAZED FROM SHOCK AND THE NUMBING FURY OF THE BARRAGE ...

COLONEL FRASER? IS HE STILL ALIVE?

I DON'T KNOW, SIR. THE COLONEL MADE A RUN FOR WHERE WE LEFT OUR RADIO TO TRY AND CALL OFF THE BARRAGE FROM OUR AREA!

THEY FOUND COLONEL FRASER, MUD-BEGRIMED AND STILL SLIGHTLY STUNNED, LYING NEAR THE EDGE OF A SHELL CRATER ...

GLAD TO SEE YOU'RE STILL ALIVE, COLONEL!

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, SIR?

THE GREY-HAIRED OFFICER MANAGED A TIGHT, PAIN-TWISTED SMILE.

I'VE BEEN LUCKY, NEIL. I THINK I'VE CAUGHT A BAD ONE IN MY LEG, SO IT LOOKS LIKE MY FIRST BATTLE IS GOING TO BE MY LAST.

I'LL FETCH ONE OF THE ORDERLIES, SIR.



WHEN THE TWO OFFICERS WERE ALONE, COLONEL FRASER MANAGED ANOTHER WEAK GRIN ...

BUT I PROVED I COULD COMMAND MY REGIMENT IN ACTION, DIDN'T I, NEIL?

YES, YOU DID, SIR. IT WAS YOUR IDEA TO STAGE A DECOY ATTACK TO FOOL THE GERMANS WHILE THE REAL FORCE REACHED THE OBJECTIVE.



THEN A HARSH, WELL-KNOWN VOICE BROKE IN...

YOU AND YOUR MEN DID MORE THAN I COULD HAVE EXPECTED OF ANY REGIMENT, COLONEL FRASER. I'M PROUD TO HAVE YOU UNDER MY COMMAND.

GENERAL CAMPBELL!

AT GENERAL CAMPBELL'S PRAISE, A GLINT OF PRIDE LIGHTED THE OLD MAN'S FADED BLUE EYES...

ONE THING I FOUND OUT, SIR. A GOOD C.O. HAS TO BE ABLE TO KEEP UP WITH HIS MEN IN BATTLE. EVEN IF MY LEG HEALS UP, I THINK I'M TOO OLD TO COMMAND. YOUNG CURRAN SHOULD COMMAND IN MY PLACE.

CURRAN? ALL RIGHT, COLONEL FRASER. I'LL GO BY YOUR RECOMMENDATION!

A FEW MINUTES LATER COLONEL FRASER HAD BEEN TAKEN AWAY WITH THE OTHER WOUNDED.

THANKS FOR SAVING HIS PRIDE, SIR. I MEAN, FOR NOT TELLING HIM THAT HE WASN'T **REALLY** IN COMMAND OF HIS REGIMENT. I TRIED TO BREAK IT TO HIM, BUT I COULDN'T...


I SUPPOSE YOU KNOW I COULD GET YOU COURT-MARTIALED FOR THIS, CURRAN?



BUT WHEN NEIL CURRAN TURNED, HE SAW THE KINDLY LOOK THAT BELIED GENERAL CAMPBELL'S HARSH WORDS.

BUT THIS IS ONE TIME I'M **NOT** GOING TO THROW THE BOOK AT A SOLDIER WHO DISOBEYS MY ORDERS. YOUR KIND OF LOYALTY IS RARE -- I'D LIKE TO THINK THAT SOME OF THAT SENSE OF LOYALTY WILL BE TRANSFERRED TO **ME!**





THE BATTERED REMNANTS OF THE GLENSHIRE BORDERERS MARCHED AWAY FROM THE REICHSWALD FOREST-- FROM A BATTLE THAT WAS TO CRUSH THE LAST HOPES OF HITLER'S REELING WEHRMACHT...

AT THEIR HEAD WAS THEIR NEW COMMANDING OFFICER, NEIL CURRAN. AND IN THE HEART OF EVERY ONE OF THEM WAS THE PROUD MEMORY OF DUTY WELL DONE, AND OF THE GREY-HAIRED OLD MAN WHO HAD LED THEM SO WELL IN THE ACTION OF HIS LIFE.

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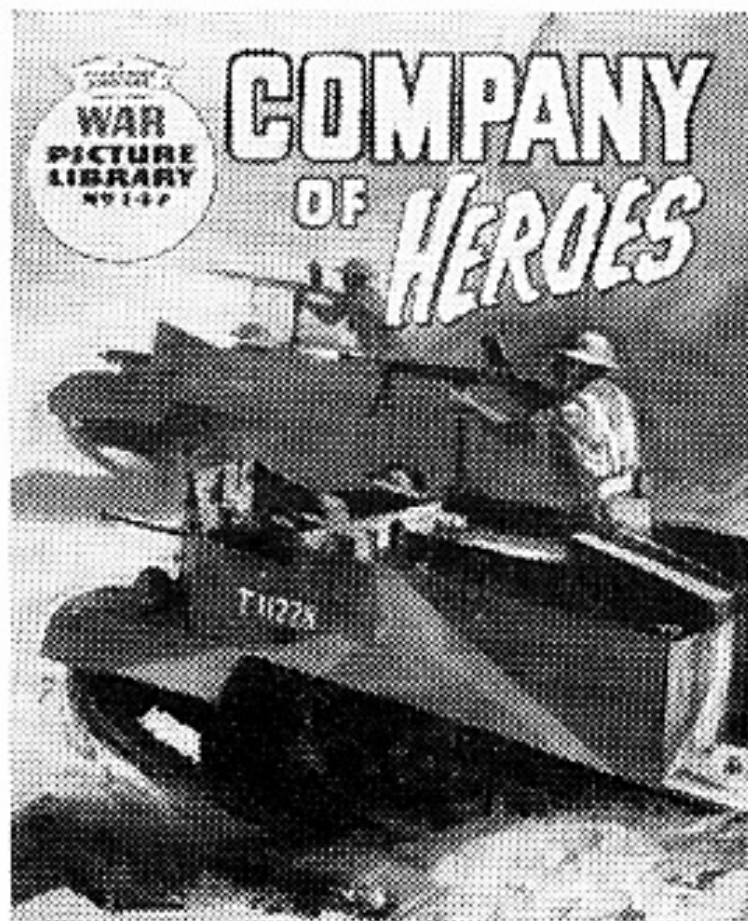
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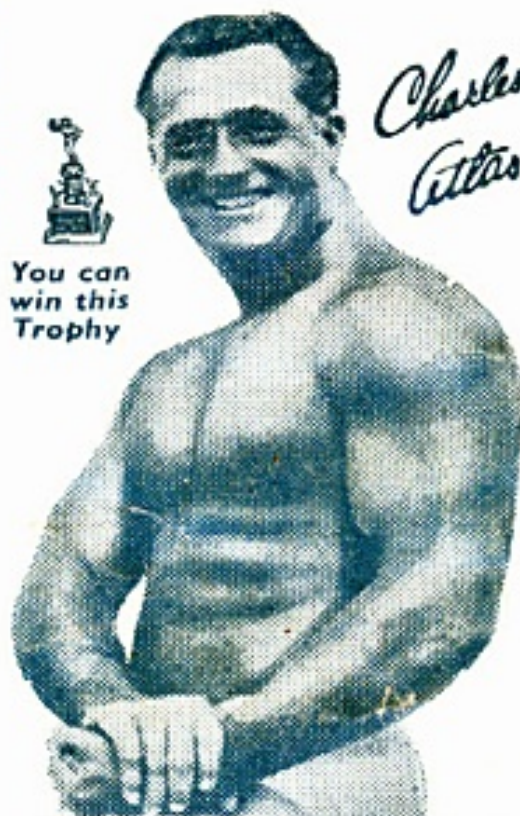
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